

# GOING IN THE DIRECTION OF TESHUVA

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Israel. He told them, "I am 120 years old today, and I am no longer able to go and come anymore..." (Devarim 31:1)*

As the Torah points out at the end, and Rashi points out here, Moshe was not referring to a reduction in physical capability. He was referring to a change of the guard; the leadership of the G-d's nation had been handed over to his student and protegee, Yehoshua bin Nun.

There is a difference of opinion regarding an event in Moshe's long life, back at the beginning of Parashas Shemos, on the posuk:

*When Moshe was grown, he began to go out to his own people... (Shemos 2:11)*

Grown to what age? According to the Midrash, it was to the tender age of 12 years old in one place (Shemos Rabbah 5:1), and to the age of 40 years in another place (1); according to the Sefer HaYashar, to the age of 18, and according to Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan, 60 years of age.

After Moshe was forced to flee Egypt for having killed the Egyptian, the Midrash says that he ruled in Kush, Africa for forty years. By the time his "reign" had come to an end, he was 67 years old. This would mean that he began his rule at the age of 27 years, which does not work with any of the opinions, assuming that Moshe had fled Egypt and went directly to Kush.

From Kush, Moshe had traveled to Midian, afraid to return to Egypt. There he met his future wife, Tzipporah, and her father, Yisro. However, once Yisro had learned that Moshe had fled Paroah and the Egyptian court system, he himself incarcerated Moshe in a deep pit, out of his own fear of Paroah. There Moshe remained for ten years, after which time he would have been 77 years old.

According to the Torah, in two years time once Moshe reached the age of 79 years, he would come across the Burning Bush and receive the command to redeem the Jewish people. In the course of that time, he would marry Tzipporah and have two sons, and tend to the flocks of his father-in-law, Yisro. In Moshe Rabbeinu's eightieth year, he led the legions of the Jewish people out of Egyptian slavery and into the service of G-d.

According to the Arizal, there is a clear path. At this point in Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Rav Chaim Vital is

talking about the spark that has reincarnated into many of the great Torah leaders of the past:

"Later, it reincarnated into Shmuel HaNavi, only to later return to Eliyahu HaNavi, as mentioned (in Chapter 32). From there, it went to Elisha HaNavi, and then to Chizkiyahu king of Yehudah. It then reincarnated into Yochanan Kohen Gadol, a Chashmonai, and later into Akavia son of Mehalelel, and after that, Rebi Yochanan ben Zakkai HaKohen. From there, it reincarnated into Rebi Akiva ben Yosef, and this is the sod of what is written: Three lived until 120 years of age: Moshe, Rebi Yochanan ben Zakkai, and Rebi Akiva (Rosh Hashanah 31b). Moshe spent forty years in the house of Paroah, forty years in Midian, and forty years leading the Jewish people. Rebi Yochanan ben Zakkai spent forty years in business, forty years learning, and, forty years teaching. Rebi Akiva, for forty years was a simpleton, then for forty years he learned, and then taught for forty years." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 36)

It stands to reason that the forty years is not incidental either. The Jewish people spent forty years in the desert after leaving Egyptian slavery that was meant to last four hundred years, or ten times forty years. Moshe himself received the Torah at Mt. Sinai over forty days, then pleaded for forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf over the next forty days, after which he received atonement and the second set of tablets at the end of the third and last set of forty days.

According to the Zohar, "Kibbutz Golios" (Ingathering of the Exiles) at the end of days, will last forty years altogether. According to the Talmud, one can pray regarding the gender of a fetus up until forty days from conception (Brochos 60a), and if I had only thought of those forty two and a half years ago, I would have been forty years old at the time of writing it, perhaps within the forty minutes it ought to have taken.

Enough said. From all of this we can see that the number forty is one of the more significant numbers in Kabbalah, symbolizing Torah and spiritual development. Even though the amount of time that Moshe Rabbeinu spent in Kush developing his leadership skills was also forty years, it was, perhaps, more important to do the same in Paroah's palace.

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## Shabbos Day:

*G-d told Moshe, "Behold, you will lie with your fathers, but this people will arise and stray after the gods of the strangers of the Land, in whose midst it is coming, and it will abandon Me and annul My covenant that I have sealed with it."* (Devarim 31:16)

We can assume that Moshe was not surprised to hear these words. Disappointed and fearful perhaps, but not disappointed. After all, even without our unique national stiff-neckedness, mitzvos are mitzvos and human nature is human nature. Let's face it, commandments have never been an

easy sale.

Nevertheless, wouldn't it be nice if we Jews would read this verse and say, "You know, we have done exactly that! G-d said that we would, and we DID . . . Let's get back to Torah while we still can." Nice? Try the biggest miracle since creation itself! This is the story of the Jewish people.

What does the next posuk say?

"My anger will flare against it on that day and I will leave them; I will conceal My face from them and they will become prey, and many ills and distresses will come to it."

This is the story of the last year, and of the last week for sure. Two weeks ago, most people outside of South Africa probably barely knew where Durban was, if at all. Now, one week and one conference (and one Parashas Ki Savo and its 98 curses) later, the events of the Anti-Racial Conference that occurred there have captivated the world's attention, making Durban, South Africa infamous.

As the dust settles, what should we Jews make of it? While we ponder that question with all the so-called experts and analysts, consider the following. A simple scan of the entire Torah for the letters: dalet-raish-bais-nun (Durban) produced an interesting result.

Why scan for this particular city more than any other? Because, as we have pointed out on many occasions, when something stands out and appears more unusual than we might have thought it should, especially when it so directly affects the destiny of the Jewish people, it is considered DIRECT Divine Providence and a message from G-d to the Jewish people. As Dovid HaMelech said:

This is from G-d, that which is wondrous in our eyes. (Tehillim 118:22).

Well, I don't know about you, but the conference and the way it was run sure made me wonder out loud. And, judging from the articles and letters I have received from different places in the world, it produced unpredictable results. Within days, Jews who had spoken little of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust all of sudden were worried about the future of the Jewish people, and their own personal safety.

In the end, so many Jews are so grateful that the conference was able to reach a "compromise" with the Arab nations when the real truth was that a compromise should never have been needed:

"The Arab states had called for the conference to condemn Israeli practices as racist. The European Union had refused to allow the conference to take sides in the conflict. 'We are not satisfied with this conference,' said Canadian representative Paul Heinbecker, registering his country's objection to the paragraphs regarding the Middle East. 'Too much time has been spent on an issue that does not belong here. We want to condemn at this conference the attempts to de-legitimize the state of Israel.'"

Exactly. From the beginning, the Arab nations tried to hijack the conference, and even though they

did not succeed, thank G-d (though Shimon Peres chose to take the credit instead), in carrying out their most desired objectives, people do not fully appreciate just how much damage was done in the end. Jews, rather than read the writing on the wall, may simply and quite mistakenly sigh in relief instead.

So, what did the "simple" scan of the Torah produce? It led to the only place in the entire Torah where the four letters that spell "Durban" in Hebrew show up, albeit in reverse though in the correct order, in the following verse:

Therefore, the well was called, "The Well of the Living One Appearing to Me." It is between Kadesh and Bared (Hebrew: ubein Bared). (Bereishis 16:14)

The last four letters of the posuk are: nun-bais-raish-dalet - Durban.

In case you do not recognize this posuk, it is talking about Hagar, Avraham's Egyptian concubine who was expelled from his home for impudent behavior towards her mistress and Avraham's wife, Sarah. Waterless in a deadly desert, it took a major miracle to save her life, and therefore, that of her future offspring.

The miracle did indeed occur for her, as the posuk above reports, and therefore, Hagar survived. Thus, the VERY NEXT posuk relates:

Hagar bore Avram a son and Avram called the name of his son that Hagar bore him Yishmael.

Who would Yishmael grow up to be? The angel who had just visited her to tell her the good news of her survival and future progeny told her that too:

He shall be a wild man: his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand shall be against him; and over all his brothers he will dwell. (Bereishis 16:12)

Interesting, no? To say the least!

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## **SEUDAH SHLISHIS: Shabbos Shuvah, 5762**

*Return (Shuvah), Israel, to G-d, your G-d, for you have stumbled in your sin...* (Hoshea 14:2)

The Shabbos between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, traditionally, is called "Shabbos Shuvah," and the first word of the above posuk reveals why. However, the Haftarah was chosen, of course, because it is the Ten Days of Repentance, four of which have already passed.

The Book of Hoshea is the first of the Trei Asar - the "Twelve Prophets." Many of the books are quite short, but all of them are quite powerful, often containing important information about Jewish

history, especially towards the End-of-Days.

It begins at the beginning of the end, after the Kingdom of Dovid HaMelech has already divided into two kingdoms, the Ten Tribes to the north (Kingdom of Israel), and the two tribes of Yehudah and Binyomin (Kingdom of Yehudah) to the south.

At the beginning, it is the northern kingdom of the divided nation that is by far the largest and more powerful of the two. Some 350 years later, the Ten Tribes have been permanently exiled, and it is the southern tribes of Yehudah and Binyomin, after the miracle of Purim, who are returning to the Land to rebuild the Second Temple.

In Jewish history, very little at the beginning is what it is at the end.

The Book of Hoshea is one of the most "unusual" in all of Tanach. Hoshea, in his zealousness to admonish his people to return from their sinning ways, referred to the Jewish people as an "estranged wife," not an unfamiliar language to be used by a critical prophet.

However, G-d was not pleased. As a result, the book begins with a commandment to Hoshea to marry women whom, otherwise, he would never have ever considered marrying. A loyal prophet, Hoshea does exactly what G-d commanded him to do, and as a result, suffers tremendous personal anguish and torture.

The message to Hoshea and through him to the Jewish people: In spite of Israel's major shortcomings, we are His "Chosen People" forever. In spite of our extreme lack of loyalty to G-d, and our willingness to "move in" with false gods and disloyal peoples, G-d will never abandon us. Hoshea's own story and personal test of an extreme, drives home the point that the bond between G-d and the Jewish people is an eternal one.

The Talmud, in discussing the Final Redemption, wants to know if G-d will redeem His people only if they are worthy of being redeemed (Sanhedrin 97b). The first opinion states that redemption will only come if the Jewish people are deserving of being redeemed. The second opinion, of course, says just the opposite. Each brings a verse to support their opinion.

In the end, the Talmud reaches a "compromise:" If the Jewish people are NOT deserving of being redeemed at the End-of-Days, G-d will cause a ruler to arise who will decree against the Jewish people as did Haman in the days of Mordechai and Esther, making their lives so difficult that Jews far and wide will be "forced" to turn back to G-d, and BECOME deserving of redemption.

This will NOT be because G-d has abandoned us, or because He has come to hate us. Just the opposite! He will do this because He LOVES us, and because He still cares about us. Whatever will befall us at the End-of-Days will be because G-d is trying to bring redemption, not put it off.

Hoshea's message, one fitting for the Aseres Yemai Teshuvah: If we love OURSELVES as much as G-d loves us, we'll return to Him BEFORE His will "forced" to set up the Hamans of history to do what

we ought to do for ourselves.

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## **MELAVE MALKAH:**

### **History & Beyond: Last Installment**

This is the last installment of what has been a multi-part series outlining a more Kabbalistic outlook on world history. G-d willing, the entire series will remain on my website, [www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org), which will also contain additional notes that have not appeared in this section of the weekly parshah sheet.

There is so much more to say, but even what was presented was quite deep and complicated, depending upon the level of the reader, which when it comes to "Perceptions," can vary tremendously.

What was the point? Perspective. We learn from the Midrash and so many other holy works that the yetzer hara, that aspect of life that allows us to compromise on values that we know we ought not to compromise on, depends upon our losing perspective. It needs to somehow "make us" believe that the mistake we are about to make is "not so bad after all."

On Yom Kippur, when we gain that perspective back by reviewing in earnest the severity of our "mistakes." This is why on Yom Kippur the yetzer hara is powerless (Yoma 20a). This is also why Yom Kippur is associated with the eighth sefirah, Binah, which means "understanding" and the World-to-Come, where the purpose of existence is one hundred percent clear.

The goal of the yetzer hara is to involve a person so deeply in everyday mundane (and even not-so-mundane) matters that one has no time to glimpse the "big picture." It is constantly looking for new ways to distract us away from the goals of creation, and our own personal purposes for being here. "Live for today" is its favorite motto, and it takes advantage of our bodily desires to drive the point home.

Righteous people know this, and this is precisely what makes them righteous. For, as the Talmud warns, "A person does not sin unless a spirit of insanity enters him" (Sotah 3a), meaning that, at the moment of sin, he loses his perspective on what counts the most, and why.

The goal of Torah IS perspective, and must remain so. For, even Torah can become a distraction from the true goal of life, albeit one of the safer and holier ones. However, even people who learn Torah can remain on spiritually low levels, relatively speaking, and become terrible representatives for G-d's holiest gift to mankind after life itself.

This happens when the study of Torah remains on the level of "Asiyah," the World of Action, which Torah Beriyah, the level of Torah within our possession ever since the Jewish people sinned with the golden calf, deals with primarily. Usually out of ignorance, sometimes out of fear, people can forget

that Torah Beriyah is only meant to be a threshold to Toras Atzilus, the much higher, more sublime level of Torah understanding - the ULTIMATE big picture.

All right, not everyone, and even most people are not prepared to make the jump to such a higher level of Torah understanding. In fact, doing so prematurely can lead to even greater ills than not trying at all. Therefore, like all of Judaism, Torah-understanding is a spiritual and intellectual tight-rope balancing act. But, walk the rope we must, if we are to gain and maintain the necessary perspective to not become "servants" to our yetzer haras - the ultimate form of idol worship.

I hope this series of classes, if anything at all, opened the minds' eyes for all those who read the material and for whom it was new. I hope that it allowed people to glimpse beyond their immediate intellectual reality, in order to grasp that a bigger picture exists, one beyond the business world, one beyond our social spheres, even one beyond the deadly situation within which we find ourselves at this late stage of history.

May we become elevated to the point that we become worthy of sharing G-d's vision of reality, as much as is humanly possible, and in doing so, merit to witness the time when, as the prophet has said, "the world will be full (G-dly) understanding.

Have a great and meaningful Shabbos, and G'mar Tov  
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